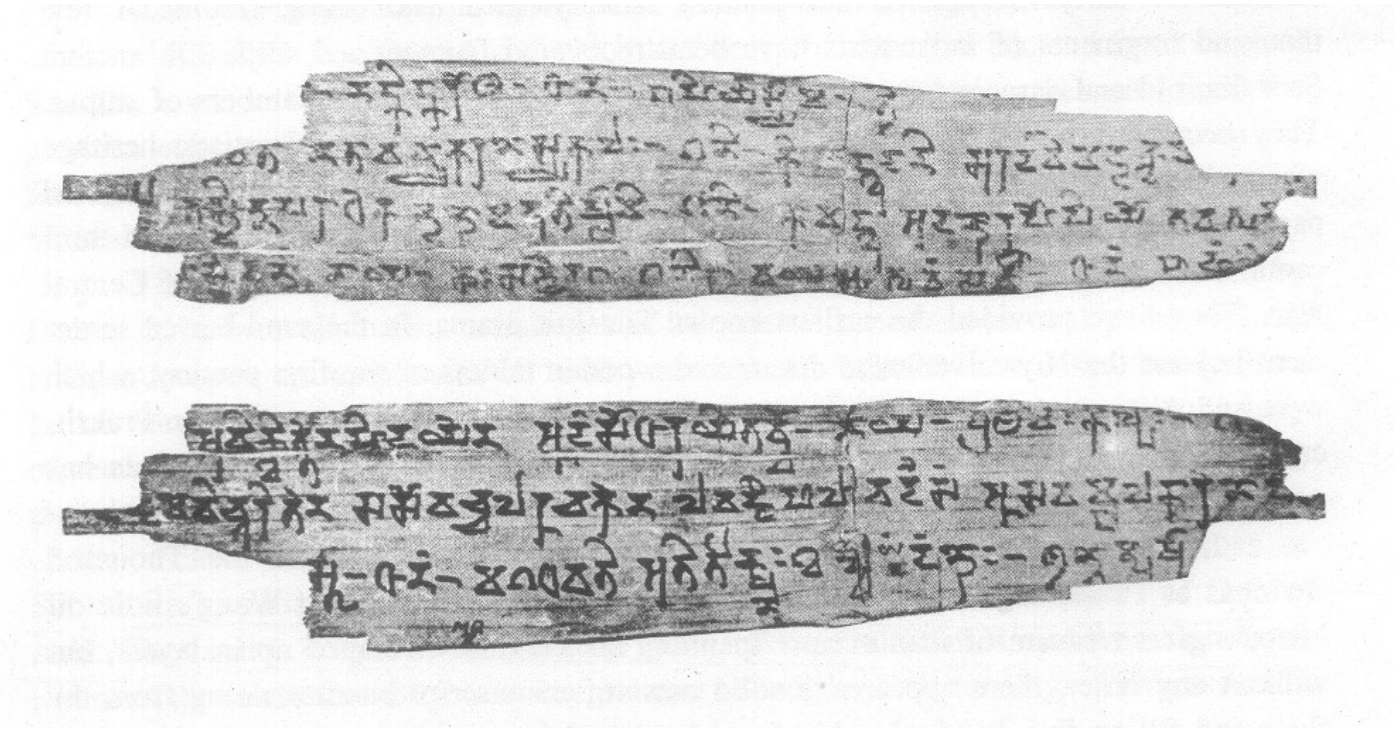
SANSKRIT MANUSCRIPTS AND INDIAN SCRIPTS IN JAPAN

BY Prof. Dr. Shashibala

A rich literary treasure of Sanskrit literature consisting of dharanis, tantras, sutras and other texts has been kept in Japan for nearly 1400 years. Entry of Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures into Japan was their identification with the central axis of human advance. Buddhism opened up unfathomed spheres of thought as soon as it reached Japan officially in AD 552. Prince Shotoku Taishi himself wrote commentaries and lectured on Saddharmapundarika-sutra, Srimala-devi-simhanada-sutra and Vimala-kirt-nirdesa-sutra. They can be heard in the daily recitation of the Japanese up to the day.

Palmleaf manuscripts kept at different temples since olden times comprise of texts which carry immeasurable importance from the viewpoint of Sanskrit philology although some of them are incomplete

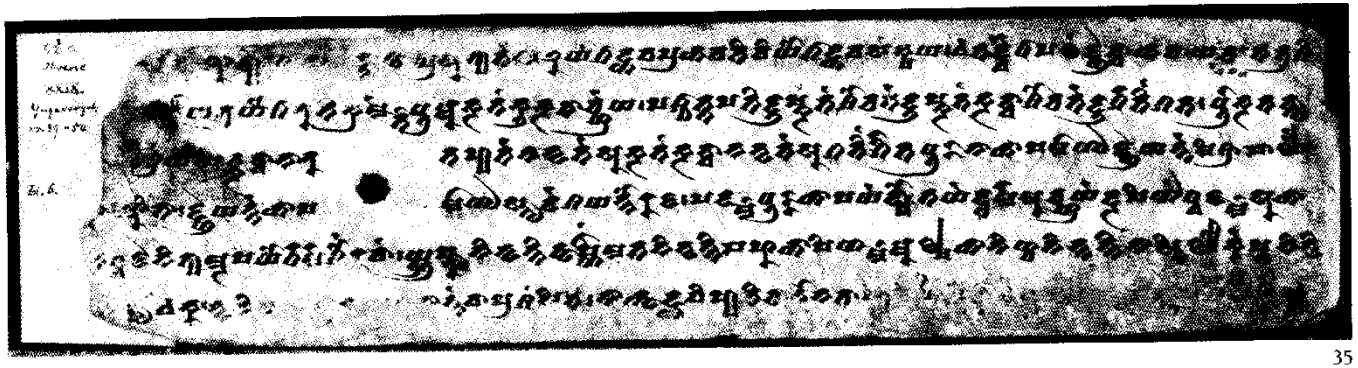
Sanskrit manuscripts crossed the boundaries of India along with the expansion of Buddhist philosophy, art and thought and reached Japan via Central Asia and China. Thousands of Sanskrit texts were translated into Khotanese, Tokharian, Uigur and Sogdian in Central Asia, on their way to China. With destruction of monastic libraries, most of the Sanskrit literature perished leaving behind a large number of fragments which are discovered by the great explorers who went from Germany, Russia, British India, Sweden and Japan. These excavations have uncovered vast quantities of manuscripts in Sanskrit. Only those manuscripts and texts have survived which were taken to Nepal and Tibet or other parts of Asia. Their translations into Tibetan, Chinese and Mongolian fill the gap, but partly.



- A number of ancient Sanskrit manuscripts are strewn in the monasteries nestling among high mountains and waterless deserts. The earliest known Sanskrit manuscripts go back the first century AD found from Afghanistan but they are in a sad condition. Following them are fragments of a Sanskrit manuscript of a drama: Sariputraprakarana, from the Kushana period, that is the second century AD, discovered from Qyzil in the Turfan area of Central Asia.
- Out of the twelve fragmentary texts, four contain Sarvatathagatatattvasangraha, one is of Prajnaparamita, another of Usnisavijayadharani and seven belong to the Abhidharma literature. A number of paper and palmleaf manuscripts have been transmitted to date. Most important among are Sukhavativyuhasutra and MAhaparinirvanasutra. A large number of manuscripts are collected by the Japanese scholars till date.

Slanting Gupta script, 5th-6ht century, ink on paper

Udanavarga, Dunhuang, China,



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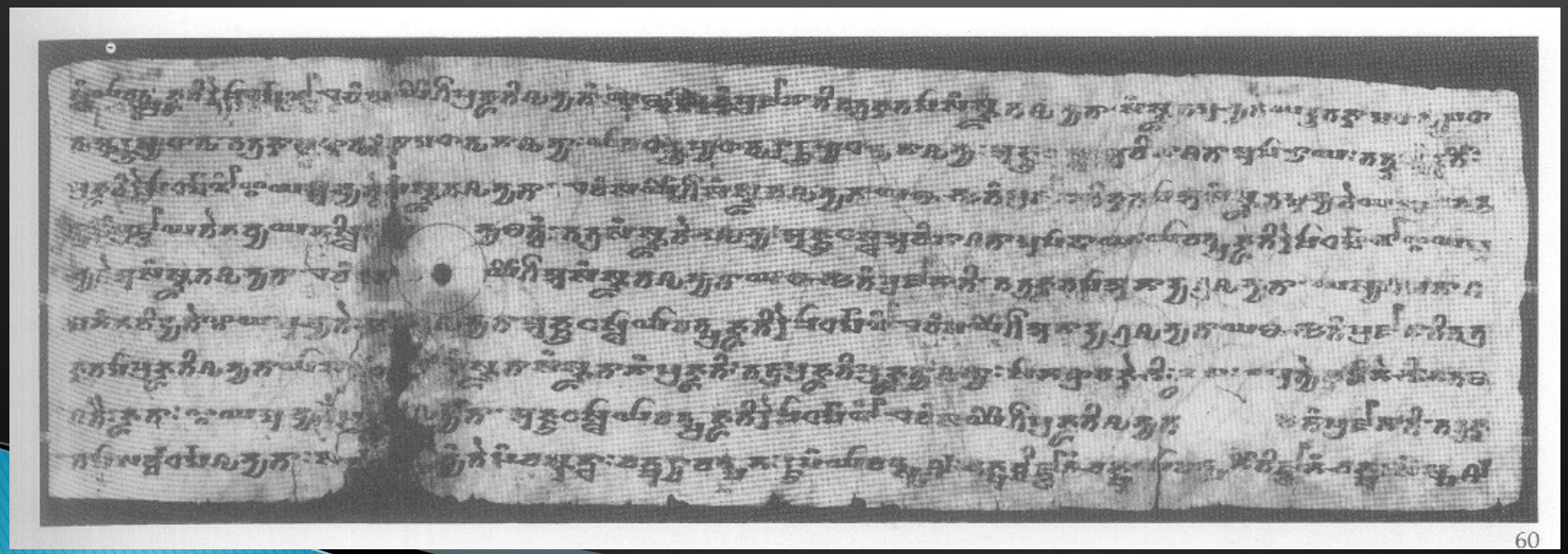
- Two Indian scripts that were used to write Buddhist scriptures and edicts of Ashoka are Brahmi and Kharosthi. Kharosthi was used in Northwestern India and in the neighboring area of Central Asia roughly between fifth century BC to third century AD. Ashokan edicts discovered from two places in the NW, in modern Pakistan are written in Kharosthi. But Brahmi came into common used in the NW India after the third or fourth century AD displacing Kharosthi.

1. Northwestern Gupta script, 7th century, ink on birch bark, Vinayavastu of Mulasarvastivadins from a stupa at Gilgit, (now) Pakistan, 2. Upright Gupta script, 7th-8th century, ink on paper,
Asta-sahasrika-prajna-paramita-sutra from as tupa at Khadalik, Xinjiang



- The language of Mahayana sutras and the northern Hinayana Buddhist sutras was Sanskrit and they were written in northern Brahmi characters. Brahmi gave the basis to a number of scripts to be devised in Asia. The scripts developed on the basis of North Indian style of Brahmi are different from those developed from the South Indian style of Brahmi. The scripts in Southeast Asian countries like Srilanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia etc. are derived from southern Indian scripts so they follow rounded form of Brahmi. Brahmi characters in North India began to become a little different from those used in the south. And the difference became more marked as time passed. The northern characters became very angular while those in the south became noticeably rounded.
- The oldest printed item from China dated AD 757 is Sanskrit mantras written for Goddess Pratisara, in ornamental Ranjana script, concentrically around the figure. World's oldest printed book dated 11th May 868 is Vajracchedika-sutra on transcendental wisdom, written on paper, which is now kept at the British Museum.

Manuscripts in Gupta script Usnisavijaya-dharani and Prajanapramita-hrdaya-sutra

- A number of Sanskrit manuscripts have been kept intact in Japan for around 1400 years in Buddhist monasteries, universities and museums. They are much older than those found in India. Usnisavijaya-dharani and Prajanapramita-hrdaya-sutra, written on palm leaves were taken to Japan from China in 609 which most probably belonged to Monk Yashi and before him they in the possession of Acarya Bodhidharma who had gone from India to China in AD 520. Certainly the manuscripts cannot be dated later than the first half of the sixth century being evidently written by an Indian scribe. In spite of their transmission from India to China and from there to Japan and preserved there over the past fourteen centuries, they are legible although having suffered partly on the margins and partly due to fading of ink. They are primarily valuable for their paleographic antiquity. The material and the techniques used and the style of writing resemble which were used in India later also.
- Prince Shotoku Taishi drew up the first Japanese constitution in Seventeen Articles where in the Triratna: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha were a fundamental factor. The new order was consecrated by the Usnisavijaya-dharani whose Sanskrit manuscript in Gupta script is preserved at the Horyuji monastery. Horyuji means the temple for the flourishing of Dharma—dharma-vardhana-vihara.
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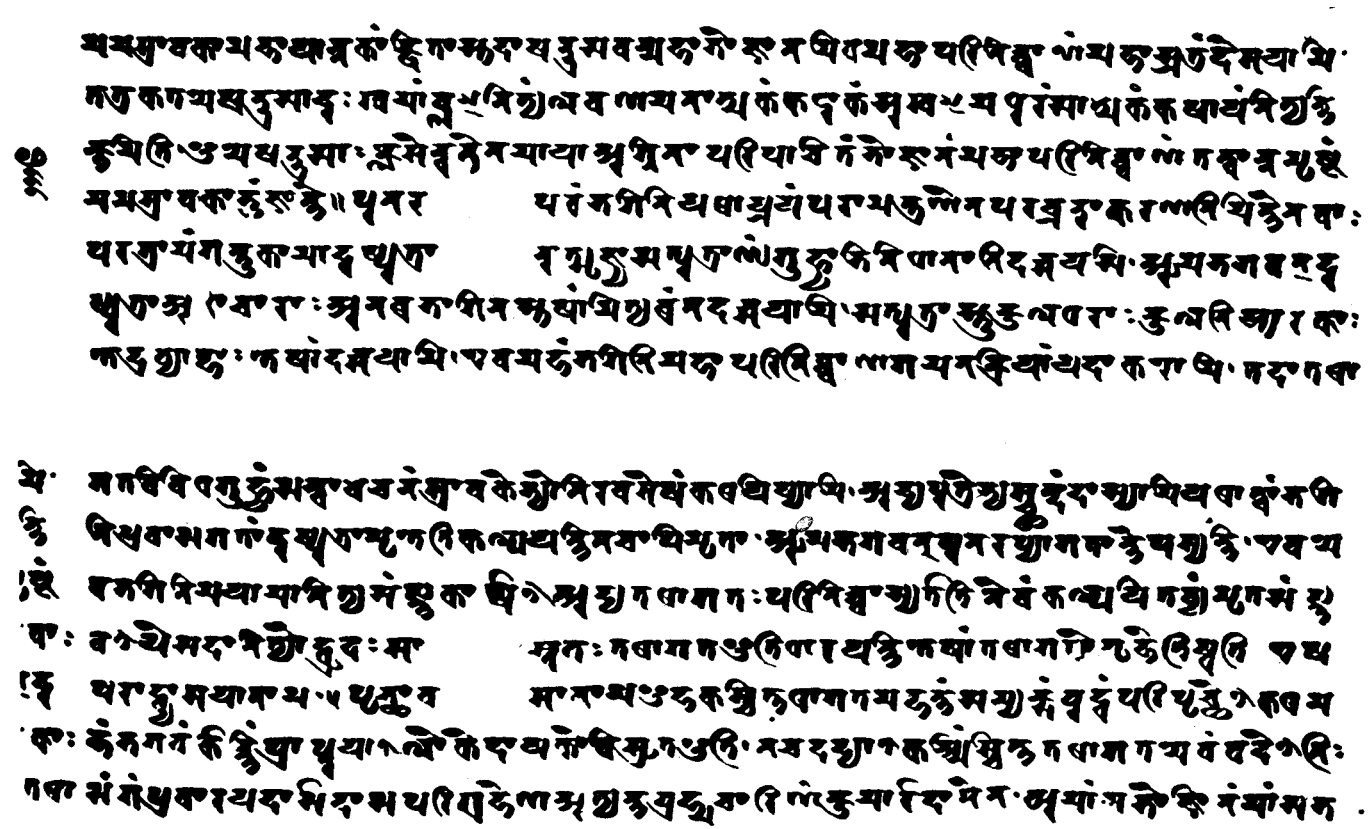
A page from a Sanskrit manuscript preserved at the Reihokan Museum , Koyasan, 8th centuryA page from a Sanskrit manuscript preserved at the Reihokan Museum , Koyasan, 8th century



Manuscripts in Sharada script

- Seven palm leaf manuscripts in the Toji, Kairyoji, Seiryoji, Kokiji, Gyokusenji, Shitennoji and Tennoji monasteries in the Kansai district are identified as a part of Abhidharmakosa of Sarvastivada by some of the Japanese scholars but Prof. Matsuda Kazunobu believes them to be folios of Lokaprajnapti, a part of Prajnapti-sastra of Sadpāda of Sarvastivada. Prajnapti-sastra is found in Chinese and Tibetan versions also. Lokaprajnapti is a part of Prajnapti-sastra of Maudgalyayana, the other two parts are Karanaprajnapti and Karmaprajnapti. It is an important point to be noted that the Chinese translation dates back to 11th century while the Japanese manuscripts are dated 9th century.
- 1. The folio kept at the Toji monastery speaks on five *skandhas*, aggregates.
- 2. The one that is in Kairyoji deals with the twenty-two indriyas.
- 3. The subject matter of the folio kept at Seiryoji is on Anusaya.
- 4. The manuscript from Kokiji monastery talks about 'end of kalpa and sapta
- suryodaya'.
- 5. The manuscript from the Gyokusenji temple gives a description of mount Sumeru.
- 6,7. The manuscript kept at the Shitennoji monastery contains 170 folios and the one at
- the Chionji monastery has 172 folios. The subject matter of these manuscript is
- teaching the effects of one's deeds. If If someone follows *aparitapa dharma,* evil
- actions then he goes to hell called niraya but those who follow *aparitapa dharma,*
- they are bound to go to heavenly abodes called sugati. The lesson is taught through
- stories.
- The folios preserved at the Gyokusenji temple are similar in content to Gilgit manuscript identified as Dharma skandha.

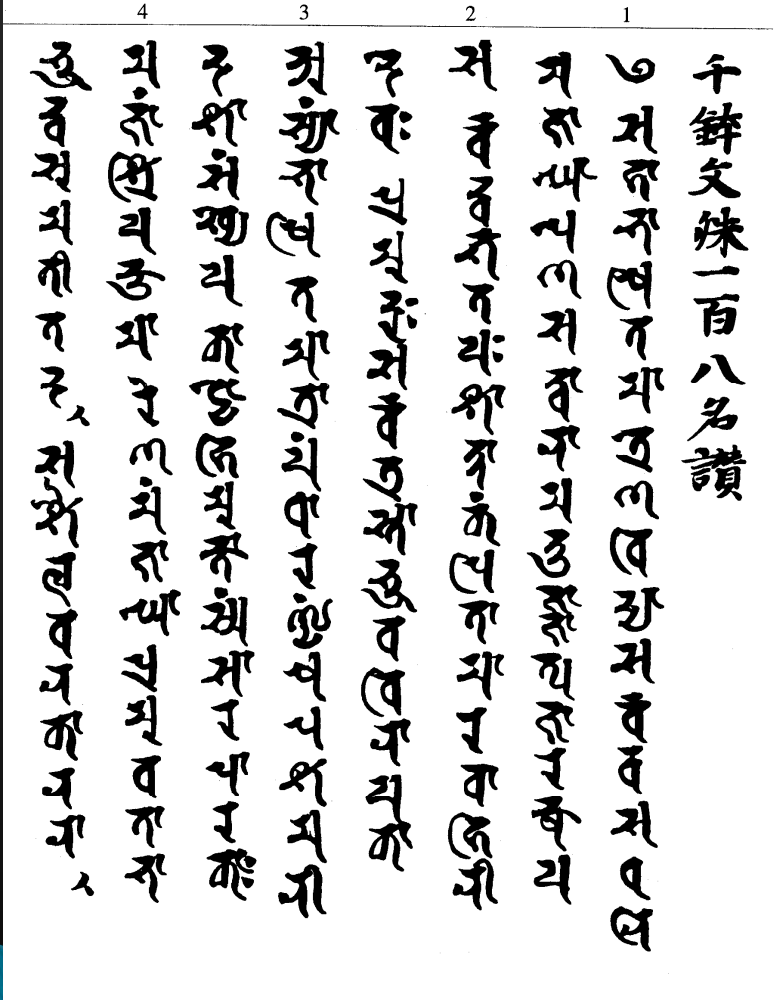
Sanskrit manuscripts in the possession of the Faculty of Letters, University of Kyoto

- Aparimitayur-dharani
- Abhidharmakosa-vyakhya
- Abhidhanottrottara-tantra
- Astasahasrika-prajnaparamita-sutra
- Others

Hymn to Thousand-armed Manjusri

- A complete tantra devoted to Manjusri was translated by Amoghavajra in AD 740 (Nj. 1044, T 1177a, K 1272, STP. 16.6378) on imperial orders. The Master explained the Sanskkrit text and Hye-ch'o wrote it down. On 19th February 742 Vajra took the Sanskrit manuscript to an Indian teacher, gave it to Monk Moksananda Bhaga[van] for being returned to Ratnabodhi of India and Srilanka.
- Along with the main tantra, there is a Sanskrit hymn of 108 epithets of Sahasrapatra Manjusri called Sempatsu Monju in Japanese in Taisho Tripitaka (1177b, 20.776-777) Lokesh Chandra, DBI 2003:8.2240) in Siddham script. Its source stems from the T'ang dynasty. There is another written in Siddham in Nagatani Hoshi's collection of Sanskrit mantrasbrought from China by Kobo Daishi which is based on some other source.
- Manjusri is related to the state in the hymns:
- *Mahamandala-sasakah*, ruler of the vast state
- *Rajyadadah*, giver of the state
- *Cakravarti,* monarch
- *Jitantakah*, destroyer of the vanquisher

Manjusri is a symbol of sastra and sastra, the weapons and the scriptures. He looks lovely and pleasing and holds a double edged sword in his right hand and a manuscript of Prajnaparamita pplaced on a blue lotus in his left hand. The sword cuts across delusions and destroys all that stands against truth. Symbolically it represents righteousness, justice, equity, love and creativity. The book is a symbol of transcendental wisdom. His ride, a golden haired lion is a symbol of action and energy.



ॐ सहभाषितमात्रेण विद्या सर्वार्थ-साधनी। मञ्जुघोषेण सत्वानामतुज्जत्पज रक्षा या॥१

सर्वदुर्गतयः शान्ता कम्पिता मारवाहिनी। देवाः प्रमुमुदुः सर्वे त्रस्ता भुवः विनायकाः॥२

अस्यां जपितमात्रायां धारण्यां शापशमन्याम्। दशासंख्येयकोट्यो हि मुक्ता संसारपारकाः॥३

मञ्जुश्रिया कुमारेण मञ्जुघोषप्रमुक्ताभा। अभूद्वसुमती तदा सशैलवनकानना॥४

Samantabhadra-carya-pranidhana-raja by Jiun Sonja

- Samantabhadra-carya-pranidhana-raja is a prayer in melodious dodhaka stanzas, which ranks among the most beautiful expressions of Buddhist piety and has been used for worship in all the cointries of Mahayana Buddhism ever since 4th century AD. It is found at the end of Gandavyuha in Sanskrit manuscripts as well as in the Chinese and Tibetan translations. It is also found as an independent text and was translated into Chinese several times in the 4th and 8th centuries and into Tibetan in the 9th century. Its manuscripts are found in the collections of Sanskrit manuscripts at Paris and Cambridge. The Peking xylograph edition consists of 19 folios and gives the Sanskrit text in Lantsha and Tibetan characters
- It was copied by Sage Jiun Sonja, a teacher of the Shingon sect, who was born in the 57the year of K'ang-his of Sheng-tsu of Ch'ing dynasty (AD 1718). He used to recite the text of Samantabhadra-carya-pranidhana-raja and other texts daily. He was well versed both in exoteric and esoteric doctrines, particularly in the Vinaya teachings.

第一頌

乃至 所有 十方 世

一切 三世 人 師子

彼等 我礼 一切 無盡

身 語 意 清淨

所有十方世界中

一切三世人師子

我今礼彼盡無餘

皆以清淨身口意

ཇི་སྙེད་སུ་དག་ཕྱོགས་བཅུའི་འཇིག་རྟེན་ན།

དུས་གསུམ་ག་ཤེགས་པ་'མི་ཡི་'སེང་གེ་ཀུན།

བདག་གིས་མ་ལུས་དེ་དག་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ།

ལུས་དང་ངག་ཡིད་དང་བས་ཕྱག་བགྱི་འོ་॥༡॥

(१-१) पे. མིའི་

(२) पे. པོ་

晋經云

身口意清淨

一心恭敬礼

除滅諸垢穢

十方三世

三世一切佛

真元經云

所有十方世界中

我以清淨身語意

三世一切人師子

一切稱礼盡無餘

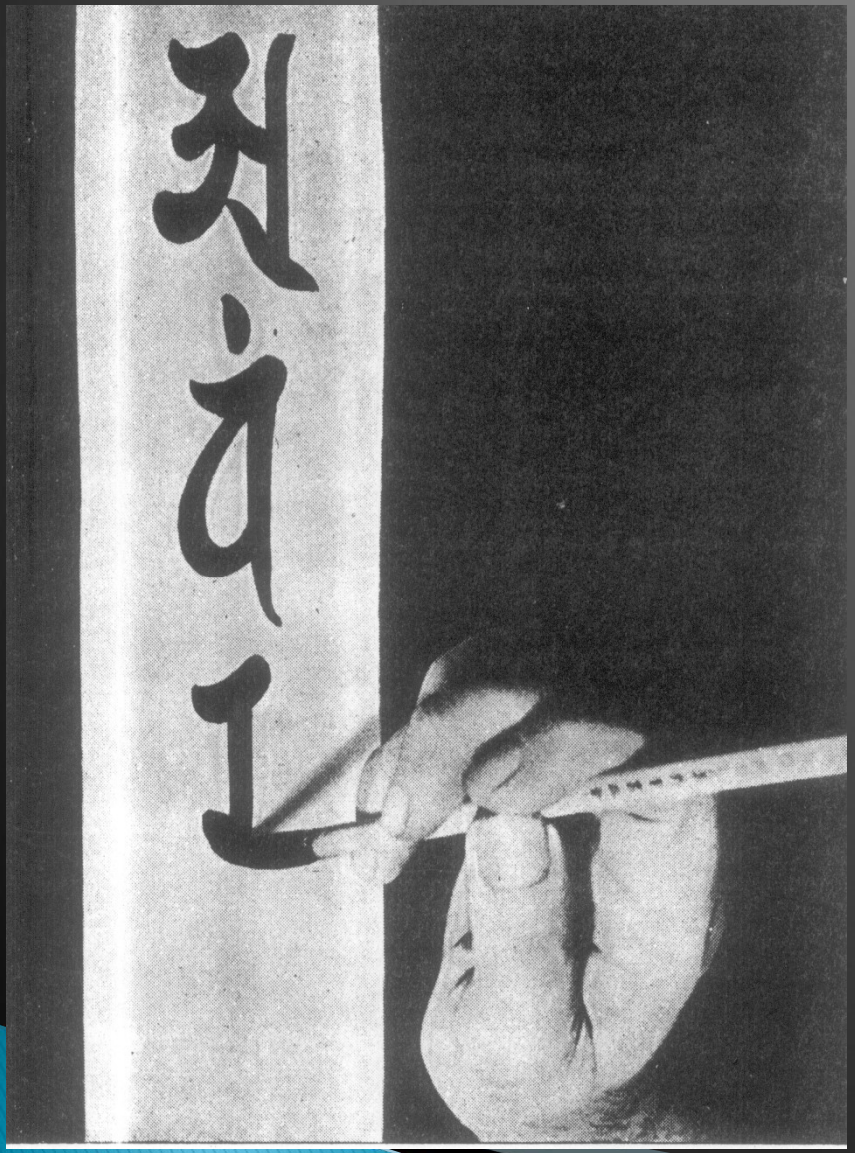
- The pages are taken from the xylograph reproduced by the International Academy of Indian Culture, presented to Prof. Dr. Raghu Vira by the Akademia Nauk of the USSR. The same xylographic edition is referred to in 'A Catalogue of Japanese and Chinese Books and Manuscripts' by Bunyiu Nanjio.
- Here the Sanskrit text is given in Siddham characters with lateral Chinese word-meanings, followed by three translations in Chinese. The first is b Amoghavajra (AD 746-771) of the T'ang dynasty, the second is a translation by Buddhabhadra (AD 420) of the Eastern Tsinn dynasty and the third is done by Prajna (AD 796-798) of the T'ang dynasty. (Sushma Devi, Samantabhadracarya-pranidhana-raja, International Academy of Indian Culture, New Delhi, Satapitaka vol. 4)
- The great sage Jiun Sonja was a man of great virtue. At the age of 14 he became thoroughly familiar with Siddham. He was a talented calligrapher. His calligraphy was highly regarded. His writings comprise a thousand fascicules (kwans). Some of them were published by the 'Jiun Sonja One Hundred Fiftieth Death Anniversary Commemorative Society '. International Academy of Indian Culture, New Delhi, published some of his works in two volumes.

- Sanskrit texts translated into Chinese are the lost heritage of India.
- The Taisho edition of the Tripitaka has over 3360 works translated from Sanskrit.
- A large number of hymns were taken to Japan from China for recitation on special occasions. Special musical notations were written to chant the mantras. This special genre of music is termed Bombai or Shomyo. To this day there are special colleges of Buddhist music at Kyoto and Koyasan.

SIDDHAM

- Siddham, a form of Brahmi scriipt and an elder sister of Nagari became popular in China and Japan especially with the rise of Mantrayana Buddhism. It was used for writing dharanis, mantras and seed syllables, *bijaksaras*. It became a living script of such intrinsic value as to deserve a place in the realm of fine arts and is indeed considered on par with painting. It is used for calligraphic and decorative purposes. A number of Chinese and Japanese monks devoted themselves to study the script and for more than a thousand years they guarded the treasure this of Indian culture.
- The Japanese write mantras in artistic Siddham Nagari script which was not purely a writing system but a visual medium of an intrinsic dimension. It is the Nagari scrip of eighth-ninth century which was introduced to Kobo Daishi by the Kashmiri scholar Prajna. It has been designated by the Japanese as Shittan, a corruption of Sanskrit term Siddham. This form of Nagari has a calligraphic charm of its own, in expressive curves and subtle nuances of brush and ink. It is also written in sturdy and dynamic strokes of a wooden stylus.

Writing siddham with a brush and with a stylus



- Though Amoghavajra propagated the correct writing of the Indian script and evolved a unified system of transcribing Sanskrit sounds with Chinese characters yet the Tantic teachers stressed that a mantra transcribed as accurately as possible could never be as efficacious as those written in the original script. So Subhakarasimha, Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra and other masters wrote in a later form of Brahmi script that seems to have been widely used in India. Thus the script became the style of writing favored by the Chinese and the Japanese Buddhists for writing mantras and dharanis which has remained in use till the present day.

- The great monk scholar Kobo Daishi started the study of Sanskrit letters known as Siddham. They were used in northern India from sixth to twelfth century AD as the northern Brahmi script. Most of the scriptural manuscripts conveyed to China during the T'ang dynasty (618–907) were written in Siddham characters.

The script was used in India in around 1000 Ad as has been written by the Arab scholar Alberuni:

"The most generally known alphabet is called siddhamatrka which by some is considered as originating from Kashmir… … …. But it is also used in Varanasi .. … … … . The same writing is used in Madhyadesa.. … … … ."

The term Siddham is also mentioned by I-ching:

"They (Indians) begin their (Sanskrit) study with the His-t'ang-chang or Siddham writing tables. This book is also called his-ti-ra-su-tu (siddhiarstu)… … … … .This means success and good luck. … … ." Every time the teacher used to write a new paradigma on the writing board he would first write at the top 'siddham' or 'siddhirastu'.

This passage gives the reason why the script is called 'siddham'.

The word siddham became a common parlance a designation for script, a colloquial equivalent of the literary word *lipi* and the Chinese pilgrims adopted this term siddham for the form of the Indian script that they found in use there in the 7th-9th century.

Since the boards used for teaching this script were called siddham writing boards this term was later used as the title of books containing elementary writing lessons.

In China and Japan the name Brahmi actually refers to the siddham script.

Another northern-Brahmi derived script is Tibetan devised for writing translations of Indian texts around the seventh century AD.

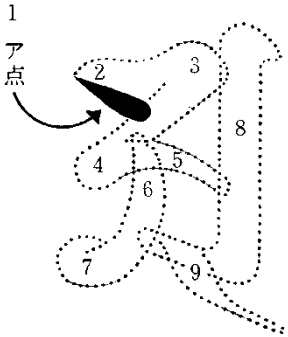
The Hangul writing system of Korea is thought to have been created under the influence of the Tibetan script.

Siddham Letters as Objects of Worship

- Bijaksaras, the symbolic syllables written in Shittan are objects of worship when they represent the essence of the divine beings, such as 'a' is written for Agni, 'ca' for Candra, 'i' for Indra and so on. Surya in Japan represents the time aspect of human life, and alongwith Candra it denotes eternity in cosmic order. Seed syllables are placed on lotus flowers to indicate their divine origin.

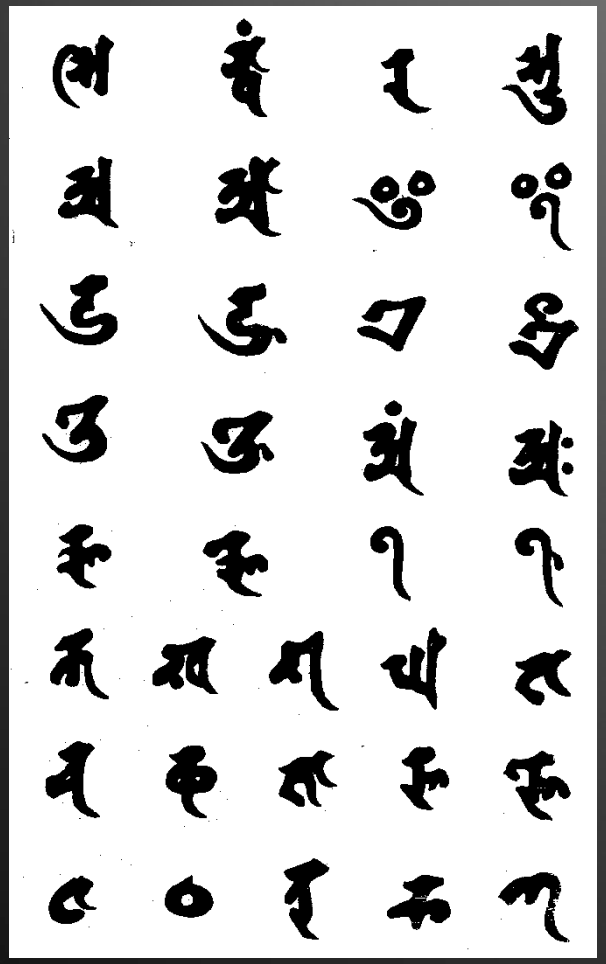
Seed syllable for Ganapati

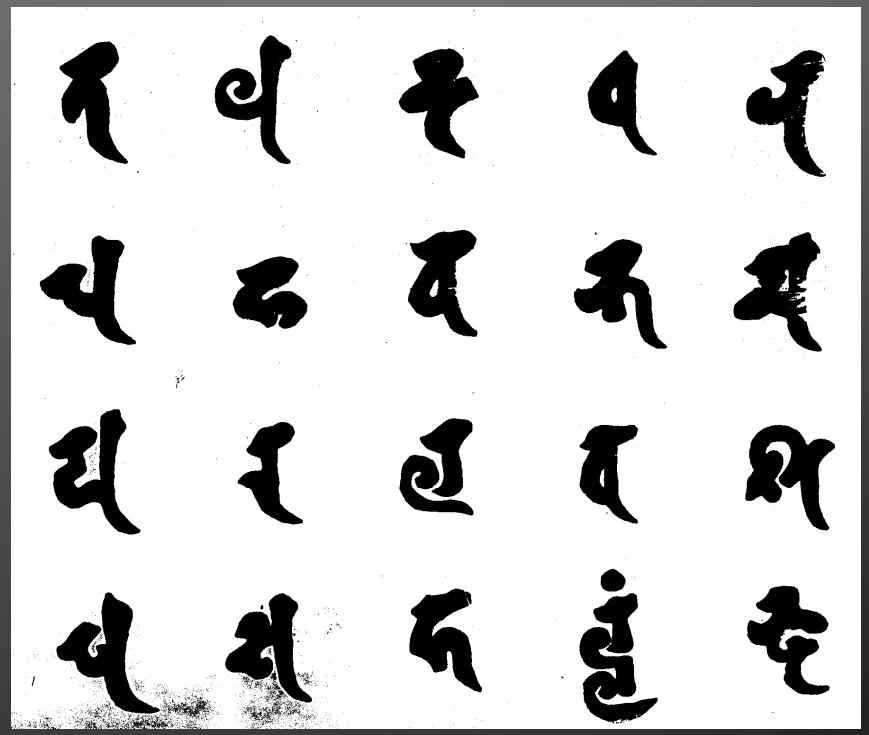
- Many Japanese who do not know Sanskrit are familiar with the Indian Siddham letters.
- Buddhist sutras inspired the finest calligraphy and printing styles in Japan. No book was printed outside a temple. The Japanese manuscript is a commentary on the Lotus Sutra, by Shotoku Taishi (573-621). He was a symbol of the special relationship between Buddhism and the state. The earliest surviving example of printed matter in Japan is Hyamanto darani, One Million Pagoda daharani, produced between 764 to 770 by the order of Empress Shotoku as thanksgiving for the defeat of a rebellion. Emperor Shomu (701-56) strongly promoted copying the entire Buddhist Tripitaka. Thus sutra copying became a major industry in Japan. Wooden tablets called sotōbas i.e. stupas, written in Siddham letters are often found in cemeteries.



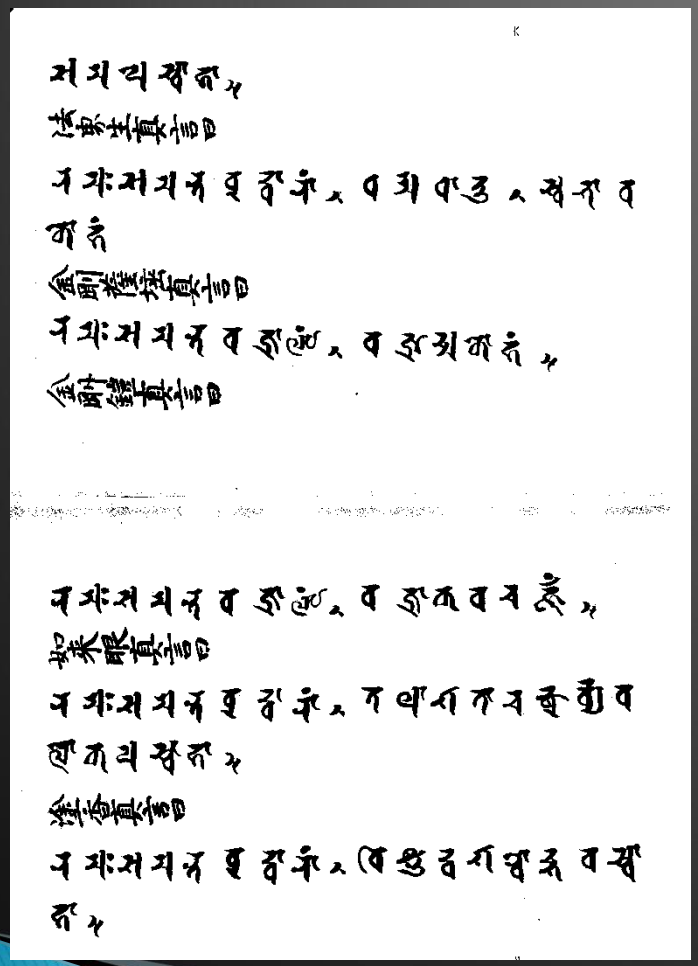
- The Japanese alphabets Katakana and Hiragana are based on the Sanskrit sound sequence: a, i, u, e, o, ka, ki, ku, ke, ko, … … … . The alphabets were divised by the great monk Kobo Daishi who began to democratize education by founding a school for the chidren of the common people. Hiragan alphabets are the cursive form which was woven into the Iroha poem. Iroha uta contains 47 letters, each letter occurring only once. It was a literary marvel. It is a free translation of a Buddhist poem composed in ancient India:
- *Sarve samskarah anityah utpadavyayadharminah/*
- *Tesam vyupasamah sukham avadat mahasramanah//*
- The new syllabry was a revolutionary step in Japan's civilization. It is called '*dhvani pancasika*'. To this day every Japanese begins his education with this eroha poem. Some times dictionaries are arranged in this sequence.

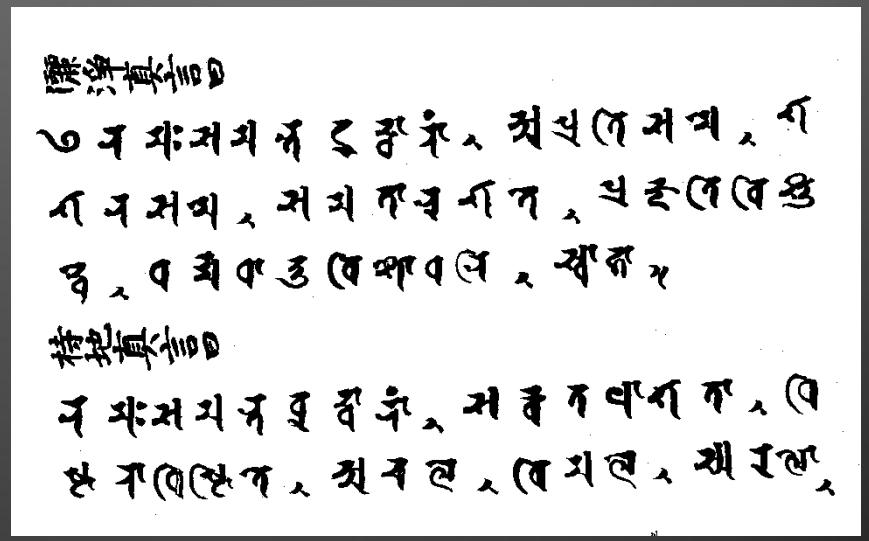
Siddham alphabets



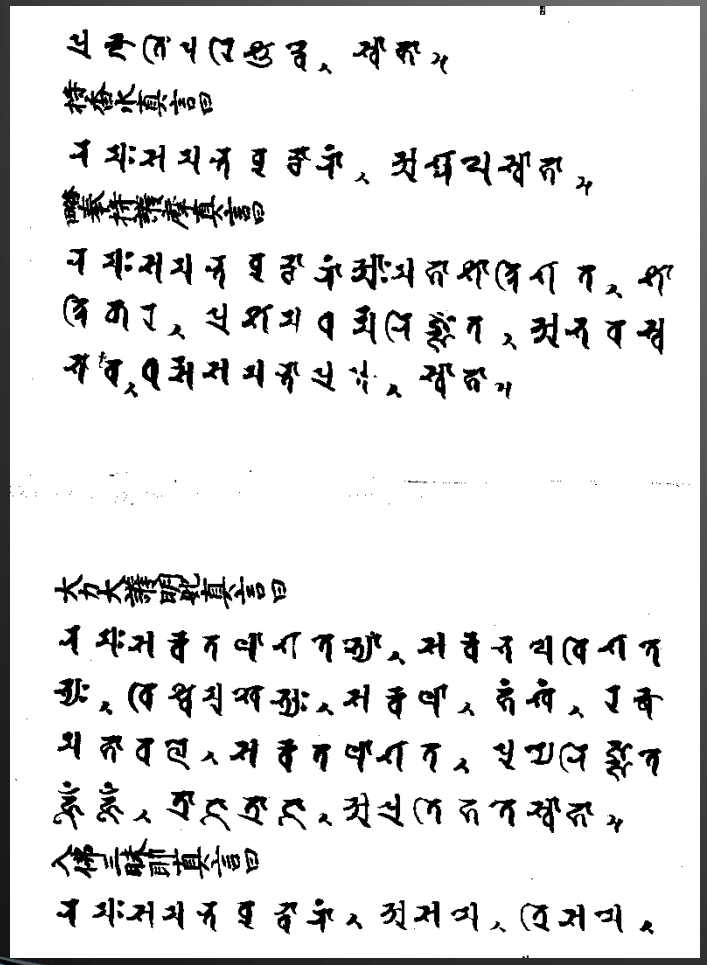


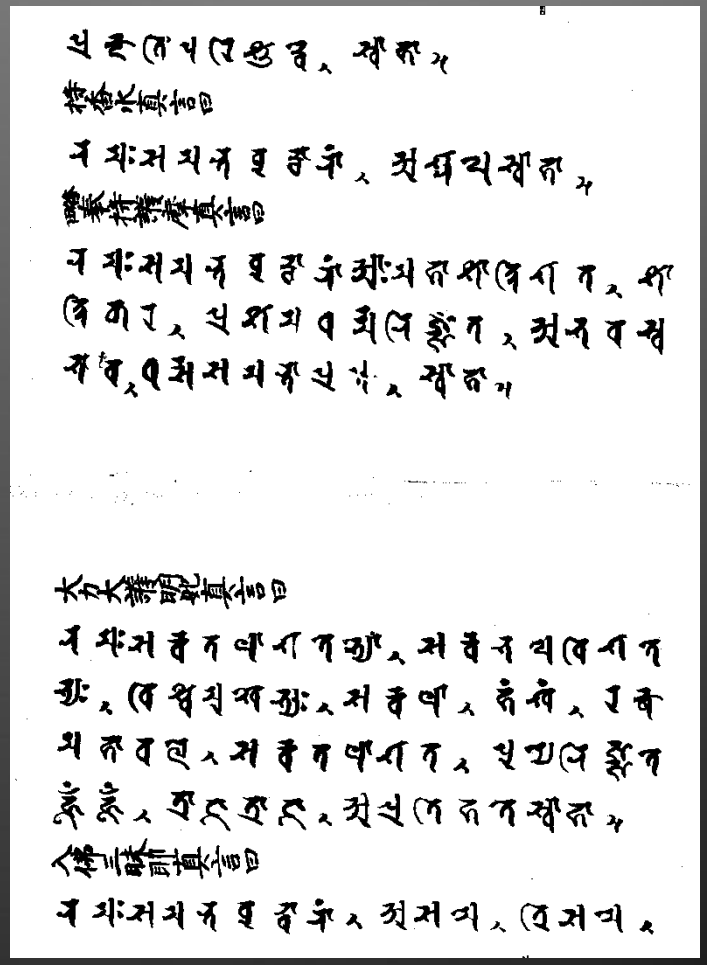
Mantras written by Kobo Daishi





Mantras written by Kobo daishi





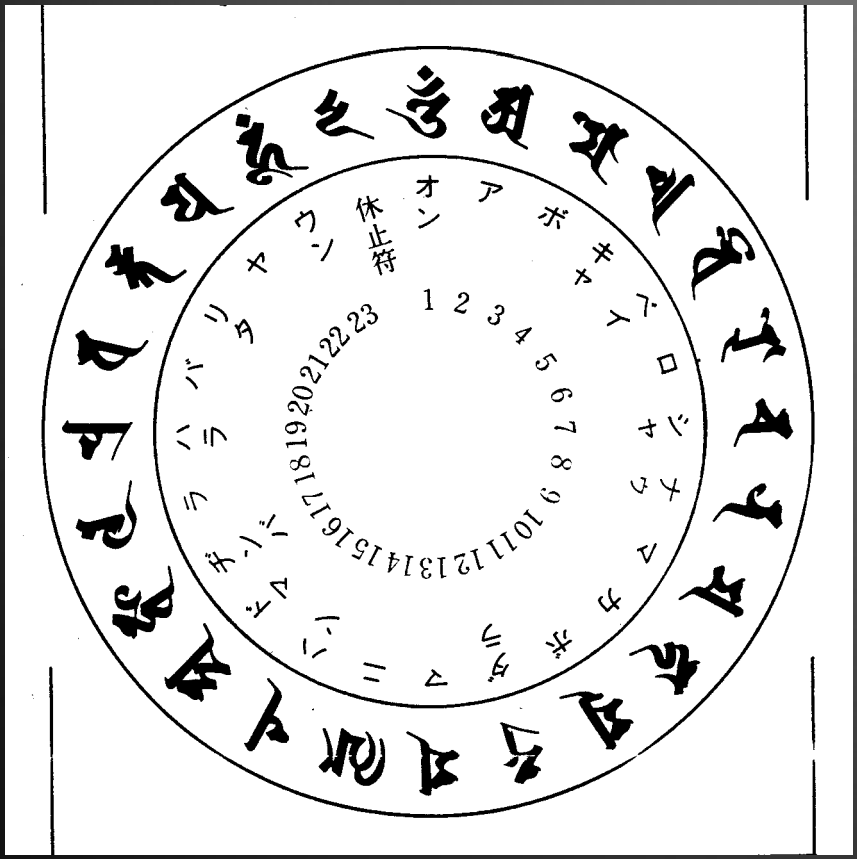
- Sanskrit is a common linguistic inheritance of India and Japan. In Japan '*bandai*' was used in place of yours truly at the end of a letter. It is Sanskrit '*vande*'. The Japanese word '*tsunumi*' for drum is Sanskrit '*dundubhi*'

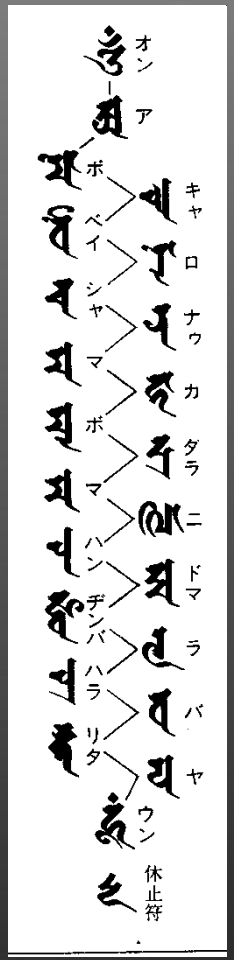
- Usage of Indian script as sacred has an interrupted history in Japan. Here is ‘a’ calligraphed by Kakuban (AD 1095-1143). The initial letter “a’ is emerging from a pristine white eight-petalled lotus, situated on the adamantine plane of the vajra. The sound symbol ‘a’ is prime among all letters and the supreme immutable: *aksaranam akaro ‘smi* (Gita 10.33).

Prof. Nagara is one of the most outstanding living masters of siddham calligraphy. His brush bruises against the canvas, shaping iyself in the reflexion of dynamism. Prof. Nagara tries to reach out to the Buddha in his calligraphy of force and strength. As a professor of design an institute of technology his calligraphy is the sound mingling with the mind and merging with mists drifting in mountain vales.

- SIVA
- Through the storming calligraphy he conveys the tempestuous mind of Lord Shiva, delimited by free and vigorous strokes. The holy waters of the river Ganga meander across the dark and majestic Himalayas in a running brush in its indomitable tandava.

A dharani written artistically

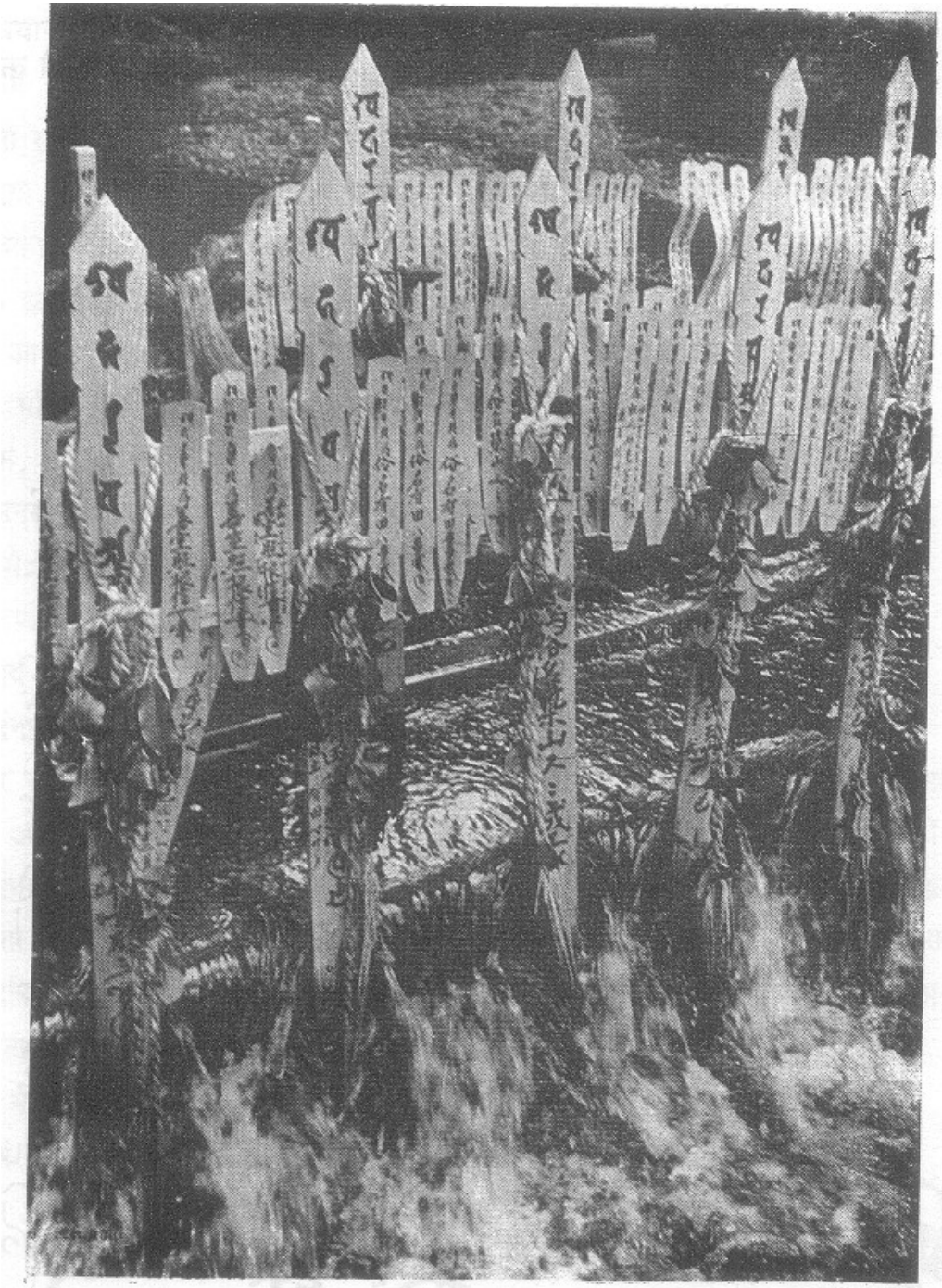




- Vayu is written in simple pure lines, rustling in the mind as cosmic breath. As wind blows unobstructed in the sky, so do the supernatural power of the Buddha emancipate all beings. The energy of Vayu in the space of Nothingness expresses the intensity to be free from all things.

69 ×

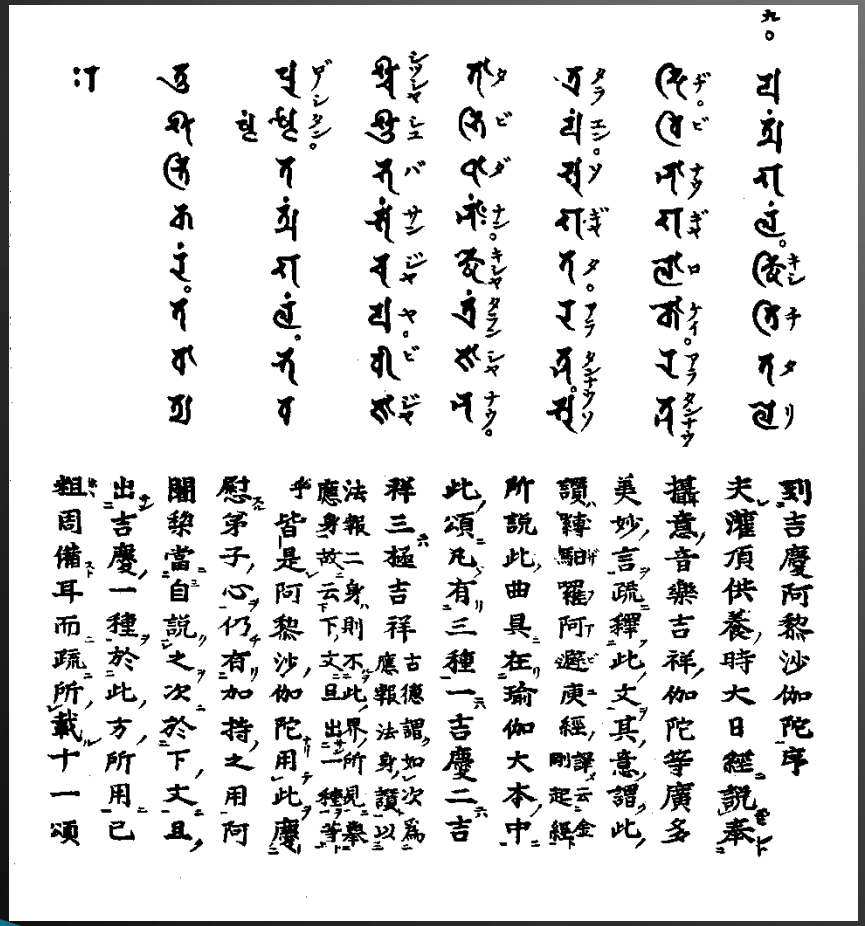
- Bhaisajya, the symbol of Bhaisajyaguru, the Buddha of healing, is written in monumental, absolutely final and sweeping in a downward movement. It has the boldness of a sword that defends the faith. It is the dance of hand on paper.



- Sanskrit mantras are written on palm leaves with the name of the ancestor and tied near the flowing river in Koyasan so that the flowing water continuously can do tarpana to the departed souls

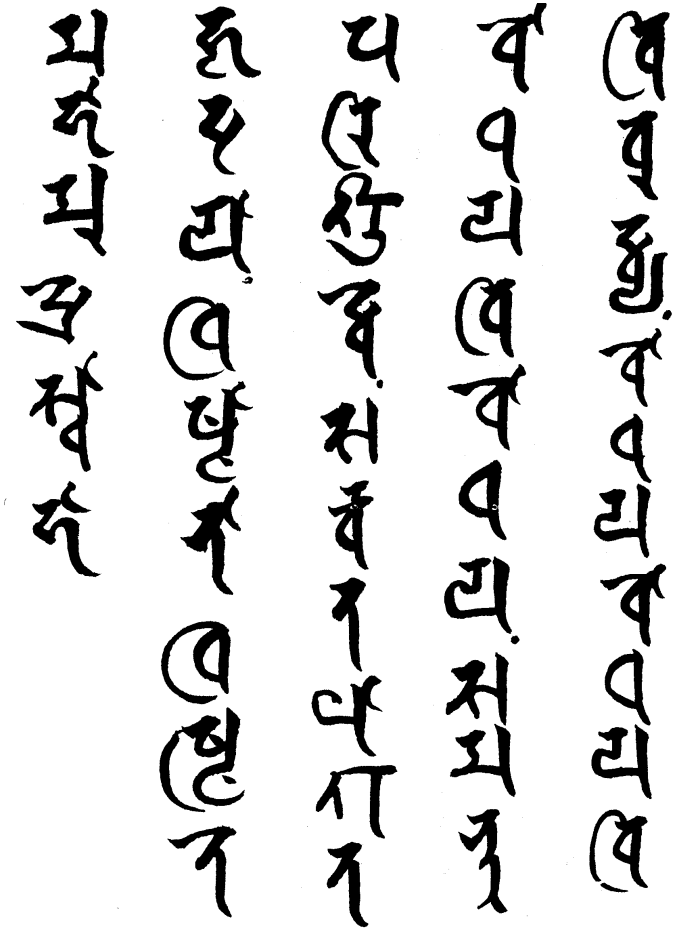
Mahosnisa-dharani for Sarvosnisa-cakravarti Vairocan
Vairocana means the metaphysical Sun and refers universal light that transcends all limitations. It is the light of wisdom that shines brilliantly at all times and at all places.

Mangala-gatha has been important in the Mantrayana tradition in Japan. There are several Japanese wood prints of this text in collections Shingon dharanis. Here is a xylograph from the Edo period, written in Siddhamwith kana transcription. Kikkyo arish-ge kudan ‘nine verses of Mangala-gatha’ were published by Shingen.



यन्मङ्गलं क्षितितले दिवि नागलोके रत्नत्रयं सुगतरत्नसुताभिधानम्।
क्षेत्रं जनैश्च शुभसंचयबीजपुष्टैस् तन्मङ्गलं भवतु शान्तिकरं तवाद्य॥ १९॥

Usnisavijayadharani



- THANK YOU